



Miller and DeVito: takeover antagonists and soul mates in amorality

Cinema

A Ruthless Raider's Romance

OTHER PEOPLE'S MONEY

Directed by Norman Jewison; Screenplay by Alvin Sargent

By **RICHARD SCHICKEL**

Doughnuts, dogs and money. According to Lawrence Garfield, better known as Larry the Liquidator, they are the three things everyone loves in a straightforward, uncomplicated way. Money, of course, has the advantage over the others in that it is fat-free and cannot poop on the living room rug.

Blessings on cynical Larry, whom tiny, manic Danny DeVito was born to play. He may be the scourge of conservatively managed corporations that labor under the delusion that the business of business is to manufacture something useful, even to be something useful as a provider of jobs and community stability. Larry's insistence that business's only business is to maximize shareholder profits may be reprehensible to most people. But he's a bubbling fount of zesty zingers, nasty but never less than half truthful, and often entirely so. Most important, DeVito's Larry is the power source for *Other People's Money*—a little C-cell that somehow manages to keep a handsome, reasonably pertinent but sometimes draggy movie sparking along.

Jerry Sterner's off-Broadway comedy turned a lot of weary Wall Street players into enthusiastic playgoers two seasons ago in New York City. It managed to disprove of Larry while giving him all the best lines and, in the end, the winning position in a classic '80s confrontation: ruthless raider vs. responsible corporation. Larry's target of opportunity is staid, gently pater-

nalistic New England Wire & Cable. Only one man could possibly be its CEO, and, sure enough, Gregory Peck has the job. His "Jorgy" Jorgenson is as stiff as Larry is slinky, a man who's all stature and no smarts. Luckily his longtime lover and assistant (Piper Laurie) has a daughter, Kate, who is building a career as a brilliant Wall Street lawyer. If anybody can save management, she can.

Or so we're supposed to think. The trouble is that Penelope Ann Miller, who is a lovely ingenue (see *The Freshman*), is entirely wrong for the role. The plot requires Larry to fall in love with Kate at first sight, shrewdly seeing what neither she nor anyone else does: that she is his soul mate in amorality. Eventually Kate is supposed to find this very sexy. But such tough-minded complexity Miller cannot find within herself. So what was once a cheerful amorality play turns into a much more conventionally moral movie—complete with a "nicer" ending than its source.

Still, DeVito's developing Napoleon complex is fun to watch, and Haskell Wexler's cinematography—part semidocumentary, part burnished formalism—is entrancing. It is a serious defect of our movies, our fictions in general, that they generally ignore what may be the central, and is surely the most entertaining, drama in American life: high-stakes corporate wrangling. So here's one proxy cast in favor of *Other People's Money*, whose managers have at least risked opening a new product line in these difficult times. ■

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